

(no subject)

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 24 Aug 2001

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Dan — 24 Aug 2001, 09:55

Dan'I wrote (among much else worthy of quoting):

In fact, I hold to the stronger form, but I think the weaker form may be more appropriate as a basis for discussion in an audience which doesn't generally hold the antecedent of the stronger form to be true or even possibly true.

You're quite right, and to be even-handed I should at least have mentioned Jung (whom you alluded to) and Joseph Campbell both of whom make all sorts of conclusions based on the recurrence of symbolism in myth without believing in a divine principle.

I'm hacking my way through Joseph Campbell right now and wish that I had picked up Frazer instead. I keep thinking - more stories, less speculation - but his main thrust seems to be that mythology reflects a number of pronounced changes in religion, so that we have older, maternal, cthonic [sp] deities overlayed with the paternal, sunny Olympian gods overlayed with omnipotent, abstract(ed) Jehovahs and Allahs, and as each of the modes of thought these gods embody came into power they demonized the gods of the previous age and enlisted a variety of stories to explain why Jove triumphed over the Titans and so on. Myths to Campbell seem to be primarily religio-political works; they appeal to us "universally" because and as long as we maintain our allegiance to the ideas that spawned them.

Shhh! Don't tell Aristotle. He thought it was the *raison d'etre* of (classical) philosophy.

Ooh now this gets interesting. How, if the ancients were so sold on reason, did they manage to be so ridiculously wrong about the way the world was put together? And how did the moderns manage to get everything (we hope) so right? The standard answer (and I'm inclined, personally, to think that the ancients weren't so ridiculously wrong and the moderns not necessarily spot on) is that modern science is experimental and ancient science "merely" observational. Aristotle sat in his garden and watched the bees; Galileo climbed up to the top of the tower of Pisa and dropped weights. And I guess Plato sat in his garden and thought about bees.

In other words Modern Reason expects a certain dirty hands-on interaction with the world that probably seemed unnecessarily messy to the ancients. And this is why I think the detective story is a strictly modern fairy-tale: the detective has to contend with a real criminal. For all that Dupin prefers to solve crimes without leaving his smoke-filled room he still has to put the solution to the test. More often than not the poor detective has to risk his neck: hardly an abstract puzzle.

Thanks, Rostrum, for the pointer to Umberto Eco. My own example of postmodern detective lit was going to be film noir but I don't really know the genre well enough to give examples.

Dan